

HOW TO ORGANIZE AN ICE CREAM SOCIAL

An ice cream social is a great way to bring people in your neighborhood together to meet their neighbors and socialize in a relaxed, comfortable setting. Just follow these easy steps to plan a successful event:

1. Set a date and time. What would be most convenient for your guests—the same day and time as your regularly scheduled community meetings, a week day, a weekend, day or night?
2. Find a location. Depending on availability, this may influence the event date. What meeting places do you have available in your neighborhood? Consider using church fellowship halls, school cafeterias or gymnasiums, library meeting rooms, Shoreline-Lake Forest Park Senior Center, Richmond Highlands Recreation Center, Shoreline Conference Center, Spartan Gym, Shoreline Fire Department meeting room at main headquarters, club houses, apartment cabanas, restaurant banquet rooms or a private residence. Many of these options have rental fees. Is there someone in your community who is a member of one of these organizations and can secure the site for free or a reduced rate? Is the organization willing to donate use of the site? Reserve the location.
3. Decide if you want entertainment. For this type of event, you want people to be able to hold a conversation, so soft music is preferable. This could be as elaborate as a professional string quartet or as simple as piped in background music, depending on your budget and desires. Schools are good resources for “free” music, such as a jazz ensemble, and appreciate the opportunity to perform. Also check with private music instructors; often they will have students who are ready willing to perform solos or duets. If you wish to hire a professional group, check with the Shoreline-Lake Forest Park Arts Council for suggestions. Depending on your entertainment, you may need to provide sound equipment, a piano, music stands, chairs, etc. Is what you need available for use at your venue or will you need to rent? Use resources available in your neighborhood and don’t be afraid to ask for donations!
4. If people are eating, they will want a place to sit. Most venues will have tables and chairs available for use. Make sure you have an adequate number. If you need to borrow, see if a local church is willing to loan them to you. Make sure you have an adequate supply of garbage cans; recycle when appropriate.
5. While decorations certainly are not a necessity, they do add a certain degree of festivity. Small table decorations (nothing too tall to see over), balloons or tiny white lights strung around the room are easy to do. If you wish to cover the tables, inexpensive, plastic tablecloths can be purchased from dollar stores (these can be wiped down and re-used). Another option is to cover the tables in white butcher paper (available in rolls), provide crayons at every table and let your guests put their creativity to work.
6. Another option to draw people to your event is a door prize drawing. If you are charging an admission fee, use two-part tickets and one half can be the guest’s admission ticket and the second half with their name on it can be their entry into the door prize drawing. Solicit prizes from local businesses.
7. You can also use this event as an opportunity to do a food drive or collection for a local charity. Be sure to include this in your publicity and be specific as to what is needed—does the charity need monetary donations or specific items?

8. Develop a plan for publicity (see section entitled “Publicity”). Choose artwork for your flyers that depicts your theme; an ice cream sundae could be your focal point.
9. Line up volunteers (see section on “How to Recruit and Retain Volunteers”) — facilities, entertainment, publicity, decorations, door prizes, charity collection, refreshments, servers (two to serve ice cream, one to monitor the table with toppings and one to serve beverages), set up and clean up.
10. Purchase supplies—ice cream, flavored syrups, toppings (nuts, candy, sprinkles), whip cream, food handler gloves, bowls, spoons, napkins, cups and water or other beverage. Bring ice cream scoops to use and sponges or paper towels.
11. Determine ahead of time how you will set up your room. Have a table by the entry door to greet guests, collect admission, fill out name tags, distribute tickets for door prize drawing, collect donations for food drive or charity, set out information regarding your organization or future events, etc. Set up another table next to where the ice cream is being served for guests to add their own toppings to their sundaes. Have another table for beverages. If you are providing entertainment, set up guest table and chairs so they are facing the musicians.
12. A week before the event, confirm all the arrangements. Check with volunteers to make sure everything is ready to go.
13. At the event, have members of your neighborhood association available to greet guests, introduce people and start conversations.
14. After your event, make sure you return your facility to its original condition (or better!)
15. Do a debriefing with those involved in the event. Determine what went well and what you would change. Encourage volunteers to give input and then use some of their ideas. Keep notes for future use.